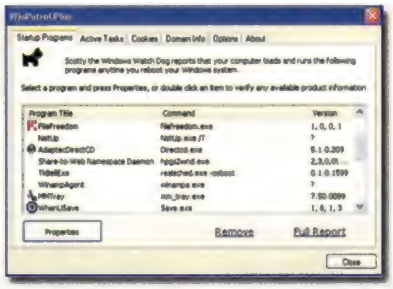

WinPatrol Plus 4.0
$12.95
BillP Studios
www.winpatrol.com

BillP Studios WinPatrol Plus 4.0

Keeping track of what goes on behind the scenes in Windows can be difficult, even for experts. One spyware app can slow you and your system down, making life frustrating.

WinPatrol Plus 4.0 aims to help you better understand the programs running on your PC and alert you to new software that's added without your permission. It easily identifies and removes adware and spyware and is equally effective at removing software that's less nefarious but taps system resources. The program runs on Win9x/Me/2000/NT/XP.

A free version shows data about startup programs and current active tasks, providing more details than Task Manager. You can remove or temporarily disable startup apps with a click. You can also swiftly kill any running app. WinPatrol can also optionally warn you if new startup apps are added, when software or a Web site tries to change your home page, and when a Web site uses cookies. The app's cookie management is a bit weak, but it can help refuse cookies with specific text in the name.

The $12.95 Plus version adds Web-based info pages that explain what the apps that WinPatrol finds actually do. Data was available for many, but not all, of the programs on my test system. Windows and other Microsoft apps were well documented (explaining a file's purpose, how to remove it, and whether it's safe to do so), but there was no information about some third-party programs, such as those that peripherals add.

Both versions are svelte; the entire installation is about 200KB. Rather than being loaded with an unwieldy database of viruses and spyware, the app focuses on system monitoring and uses the Web to fetch details. Unlike Ad-aware and some other spyware removal tools, WinPatrol is fairly fast at scanning your hard drive and Registry; it focuses on what's running now and what will be running the next time your PC boots. The interface could be more polished, but the app's ability to quickly identify questionable programs and remove unwanted software is welcome. ▲

by Kevin Savetz

WinDVD Recorder
$119.95
interVideo
www.intervideo.com

interVideo WinDVD Recorder

If you're lusting to add a DVD recorder to your home theater system but are balking at the $1,000-plus price tag, WinDVD Recorder wants to answer your prayers. The software plays and, when coupled with a video-input source, records DVDs. At about $120 (plus a DVD burner and video capture card), it's significantly less expensive than a consumer electronics DVD writer. But it may leave you wishing for more.

The program lets you create DVDs from any video source, such as a DV camcorder or live television, and you can save directly to a DVD or hard drive for later burning. The program is best suited for converting home movies to DVDs, but it doesn't include even the most basic facilities for editing clips or DVD authoring. Although it can record TV shows for later viewing, WinDVD Recorder isn't well suited as a PVR replacement. I couldn't find a way to schedule a recording for later or watch a DVD while recording a TV show in the background.

The program has good support for DVD playback, including subtitles, languages, pan and zoom, several aspect ratios, and other features common to DVDs. The interface, however, uses a hackneyed "make it look like a consumer electronics DVD player" metaphor. The result is a steep learning curve while you struggle to figure out what each tiny, unlabeled button and icon does.

The program also has some stiff system requirements, including Win2000 or XP with at least a 600MHz PIII (a 1GHz PIII for direct-to-disk recording, but a 1.6GHz P4 preferred). If your PC is on the border, try the free trial version first. You'll also need a PCI or USB video-input device or compatible DV camcorder and a compatible DVD+R/RW, DVD-R/RW, or DVD-RAM burner. Ultimately, consider saving your $120 and keep putting your pennies toward a hardware DVD burner. ▲

by Kevin Savetz

CPU Ranking: 0 = Absolutely Worthless 2.5 = Absolutely Average 5 = Absolutely Perfect